DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 680 CS 208 504

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TITLE Photographic Content of Selected Employee Publications.
PUB DATE Aug 84
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (67th, Gainesville, FL, August 5-8, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Content Analysis; *Employer Employee Relationship; *Media Research; Occupational Information; *Organizational Communication; *Periodicals; *Photographs; Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS *Employee Publications

ABSTRACT

A content analysis of the photographs included in four employee magazines was conducted for the period of 1978 to 1983 to investigate the manner in which the publications used photographs to carry messages about people, their relationship to the organization, and the work environment. The publications selected for analysis were all employee magazines of reasonable tenure running a comparable number of pages per year. Publications representing a range of industries were selected to eliminate an industry bias. The magazines analyzed contained 588 photographs of 1,215 individuals (after factoring out the back-of-book portraits). The analysis revealed that, except in the case of cover photographs, the publications favored the photograph featuring people over the photograph containing no people or people presented merely as a natural part of the setting. Forty-eight percent of the coded photographs depicted the employee at work, while 34% of the photographs showed employees away from the direct work environment. Most of the photographs that showed employees off the job accompanied feature stories about unusual hobbies or how the employee's off-the-job time was used. The findings also indicated that the publication editors had a distinct preference for depicting white and blue collar workers rather than clerical or sales employees. Further, editors displayed a distinct preference for cover photographs featuring blue collar workers wearing hard hats at work. (HOD)

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Photographic Content of Selected Employee Publications

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Presented to the Visual Communication Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, August 1984 National Convention, Gainesville, Florida.

CS 208 504

American corporations and organizations produce a significant number of house publications each year. While determining the precise number of individuals these publications reach is difficult, circulation estimates are staggering. For example, based upon a 1975 U.S. and Canadian membership survey, the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) projected a total circulation of 300 million for business publications in the two countries. During the same time period, IABC estimated daily newspaper circulation in the two countries to be 68 million.[1] Working Press of the Nation's 1982/83 Internal Publications Directory concluded that U.S. corporations were issuing house publications with a total circulation of more than 160 million.[2] In addition to reaching such large audiences, these specialized publications have reasonably high readership and credibility. For example, a 1980 IABC survey found that employees ranked employee publications sixth overall as both a current and preferred source of organizational information. The study also found that employees consider these publications to be good sources of information which are read thoroughly.[3] In addition, the study investigated the types of information employees were interested in receiving through all channels of internal communication. Employees

responded that they were most interested in receiving information about the organization's future plans, personnel policies and practices, and job related information including productivity improvement and advancement opportunities. The survey respondents indicated that they were least interested in personnel changes/promotions, financial results, advertising/promotion plans, stories about other employees, and personal news (ie birthdays, retirements, anniversaries).[4]

In spite of the number, credibility, and circulation of these publications and the existence of surveys providing baselines concerning employee interests and attitudes about these publications, very few studies have focused specifically on house journals to see what types of messages they carry. This omission from the literature is probably in large measure related to the relative youth of public relations/corporate communication within the academic disciplines and because of bibliographic control problems. Much of the content assessment work has been done by individual publication editors in the form of readership surveys or by professional organization studies such as that done by IABC.[5] In a similar vein, work such as that done by Stuart Surlin and Barry Walker has evaluated employee perceptions of content, selection, focus, and credibility.[6] At least one classic study has considered specifically publication content. In a pioneering mid-1960's study, J.W. Click analysed the content of ten prize winning magazines.[7] In addition to these types of studies, a valuable body of literature focusing on format and formula formation and execution exists. Understandably, works in this area tend to stress editorial techniques overall rather then focusing in-depth on any single editorial artifact.[8] Therefore, house publications offer the scholar a rich relatively unplotted universe to consider. The general purpose of this study is to begin to explore one specialized section of that fertile territory.

Within such a diverse publication universe exist a variety of messages designed to accomplish individual editorial objectives. These objectives tend to be publica-

specific and linked closely with organizational goals and intended readership. Regardless of the tremendous potential for editorial diversity this presents, most house journal editors use both verbal and visual vehicles to convey their messages. While the specific mix of verbal and visual content varies from editorial formula to editorial formula, editors seem to view both vehicles as important means of conveying information about the organization. However, much of the content assessment work in this area has focused either at general categories of information and editorial performance overall or verbal content.[9] Very few studies have systematically analysed the visual messages carried by company publications.[10]

This study was designed to look at one category of visual information carried by internal publications. More specifically, this study investigated the manner in which employee publications used photographs to carry messages about people, their relationship to the organization, and the work environment. Specific questions guiding the study are: How many photographs published contained people? How many people were pictured? What relationship to the organization do the individuals shown have? Are the individuals pictured in the work environment or outside it? Who is the individual shown with? If the individual shown is an employee, what occupational role does that individual fulfill?

Method

To answer these questions, a content analysis of the photographs carried by four employee magazines was conducted for the time period 1978 to 1983. The time period was selected because of recency and because it brackets the 1980 study done by IABC which measured the effectiveness of internal public relations. Some of the findings of this study have already been discussed and they provide a benchmark against which performance can be interpreted. Employee publications were selected for analysis because they are edited specifically for a more controlled internal public than are other forms of house journals.

Photographs were selected as the primary unit of analysis both because of the potential power of these highly visible editorial tools and because such images in this context are just beginning to receive serious and consistent academic attention. The potential of the photograph as a fertile information source in social science analysis was summarized by visual anthropologist John Collier when he noted that the camera record was "the least abstract of all recorded information."[11] To use Daniel Boorstin's term, each photograph may be considered as a pseudoevent marked by simplicity and the potential for stereotypy.[12] Thus, if the company publication is sending consistent and similar messages about individuals and their relationship to the company, then those messages in perhaps their most basic and manifest form may be reflected in the photographs. Photographs reproduced either totally or in part within a table of contents were coded only when appearing with an article. Thus, such photographs were coded only once. No employee photo contest photographs were found in these issues. However, if employee photo contest photographs had been found, they would not have been coded because they were not subject to the same type of editorial filter as were the other photographs generated or commissioned by the publication editors themselves.

The content analysis was conceived following the guidelines set forth by sociologist Jon Wagner in his valuable work, Images of Information: Still Photography In The Social Sciences. Of particular importance were Wagner's strategies for avoiding errors in photograph analysis which include the examination of a random sample, the analysis of photographic content in light of other data (in this case captions and text), the use of multiple coders, and the overall conceptualization of the study as a content analysis with systematic, discrete categories.[13] In addition, the categories were designed to allow for the integration of a bi-level analysis following John Collier's assertion that patterns in visual content are best identified in this manner.[14] This study included categories accomodating item listings and categorical

listings. For example, the number of employees compared with the number of non-employees provides an item list. The identification of employees by occupational role yields a categorical list. However, the nature of the research problem did not lend itself naturally to conducting the third level of analysis suggested by Collier, an inventory of significance.

The publications selected for analysis are all employee magazines of reasonable tenure running a comparable number of pages per year. Publications representing a range of industries were selected in an attempt to eliminate an industry bias.[15] Twenty percent of the issues published during the time period were coded. To avoid potential seasonal differences, the sample was drawn so that no single month or time of year would be overly represented. In addition, the sample was drawn to insure that at least one issue per year per publication was analysed. Eighty percent of the photographs were independently coded by two coders. Agreement occurred over 95% of the time. When disagreement was found, it was either resolved or the item was coded a "can't determine." However, the latter occurred only twice. Because of the high level of coding consistency, the remaining 20% of the sample was coded only by the author.

The Findings

The 39 magazines analysed contained 1553 photographs. Of these 1553 photographs, 229 or 14.7% contained either no people or the people present were judged to be a natural part of the setting. People were considered to be a natural part of the setting if they were not named in the copy or caption and were presented as part of a large group (ie an overview shot of a crowded fairgrounds, a band in a football stadium, or a head-on shot of the beginning of a marathon) or were background. The remaining 1324 photographs contained at least on person.

The total number of individuals pictured in the magazines was 1951. However, 736 of these individuals were shown in individual formal portraits in back of the

book retirement and service anniversary sections. Because this study is primarily interested in the manner in which individuals are currently being portrayed in company publications, these back of the book photographs are not included in the analysis. This deletion from the data base is further justified by the fact that only one of the magazines studied ran a formal back of the book portrait section for the entire time period.

After factoring out the back of the book portraits, 588 photographs with 1215 individuals remained. The total number of individuals shown per year is included in Table 1. As reflected in Table 1, after 1978, while not equal, the total number of individuals pictured remained remarkably stable. Without taking into account any other factors, it is interesting to note that together the publications photographically presented an average of 184 individuals per year.

TABLE 1

Total Number of Individuals Shown By Year

1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	Total
293	198	170	187	202	165	1215

But, who are these individuals and what relationships if any to the company sponsoring the publication do they have? Of all the individuals pictured, 140 or 11.5% were children high school age or under. As shown in Table 2, slightly less than one-third of these young people were shown because they were employee children. Of the remaining adult population, 73.1% (786 out of 1075) were male and 26.9% (289 of 1075) were female.

The relationship of each individual pictured to the company is also shown in Table 2. Of the total 1215 individuals pictured, 824 or approximately 68% were direct company employees. Table 3 shows that while the actual number of employees shown during any given year naturally differed from the actual number shown in all

TABLE 2

Relationship To Company Totals

Employee	824
Employee Spouse	24
Employee Child	44
Retiree	19
Retiree Spouse	1
Shareholder/Board Member	1
Customer	20
Volunteer	28
Outside Company	229
Can't Determine	25

TABLE 3

Relationship To Company By Year

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Employee	199	141	119	110	135	120
Employee Spouse	15	3	3	2	1	0
Employee Child	25	5	1	9	3	1
Retiree	0	1	6	8	2	2
Retiree Spouse	0	0	0	1	0	0
Shareholder	0	0	1	0	0	0
Customer	5	3	1	7	1	3
Volunteer	14	2	0	12	0	0
Outside Company	29	39	37	34	51	39
Can't Determine	6	4	2	4	9	0
Yearly Total	293	198	170	187	202	165

other years, the ratio between the number of direct employees shown and the number of non-direct employees shown remains fairly stable across the time period with one

exception. In 1981, only 58% of all individuals shown were employees. In almost all other years 70% or more of all individuals shown were employees. So with the exception of one year about 7 out of every 10 individuals pictured was a direct company employee. If the remaining 32% of the individuals coded were not employees, what relationships did they have to the company. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, a number were members of employee families. For example, twenty-four (1.9%) of the individuals pictured were employee spouses. However, as shown in Table 3, it is interesting to note that the number of employee spouses declined rather dramatically over time. Forty-four (3.6%) of the individuals shown were employee children or grandchildren. Table 3 also shows a slight decline overall in the number of employee children across the years studied.

A number of other individuals related to the company in varying ways were found. Since two of the four publications include retirees specifically when stating perceived audience, it is not surprising that at least some retirees were shown. However, overall very few retirees were pictured. As indicated in Table 2, only 19 retirees and 1 retiree spouse were shown. Of the other 49 individuals in some way related to the organization: one was a shareholder/member of the board of directors; 20 were customers;, and 28 were volunteers in support of either an internal company project or an external social responsibility project. The actual relationship of 25 individuals to the company could not be determined from either the photograph or the accompanying text. This is an interesting finding because it indicates that the publications studied here rarely used totally generic photographs with people in them. Thus, the relationship of about 98% of the individuals shown was in some way identifiable.

The remaining 229 individuals (18.8%) were individuals not directly tied to the organization. Who were these people? About half of them were children who tended to benefit from participating in some company sponsored program or event.

For example, 16 boys were shown in company sponsored hockey school. Many of the adults pictured were also recipients of some kind of socially responsible action by the company. For example, one deaf woman was shown working with her Hearing Ear Dog which had been in part underwritten by company dealers). In addition, a variety of elected officials were shown including one former U.S. President, one governor, and a variety of mayors and other municipal officials. Several members of the media were shown--usually at work. Of these seven were newspaper reporters, four were television talk show hosts, and three were advertising account executives. The other individuals represented a wide variety of roles from mechanics to turkey farmers, to puppeteers to Sudanese boat men.

Another factor related to the manner in which people are presented is the context within which they are shown. That is, are they shown at work or away from work? Regardless of where they are shown, who are they shown with? As reflected in Table 4, of the 588 photographs, 283 (48%) showed people within the work environment. The remaining 305 photographs either showed people outside the work environment, had no context, or contained only individuals external to the company. Photographs were judged no context if they were cut-outs or informal portraits with either no background or a blurred background. Twenty-nine photographs were judged no context. Seventy-five photographs (12%) contained only people external to the company.

If the individual was pictured in the job setting, just slightly more than half of the time that individual was shown working alone. About one-third of the photographs which depicted individuals in the job setting showed individuals working with at least one other individual. If the individual was shown outside the job setting, 45% of the time, s/he was shown alone. If the employee was shown outside the job setting with another individual, that other individual was about as likely to be someone external to the company as it was to be someone from work.

TABLE 4

Context

In Job Setting	
Alone	156
With Peers	93
With Family Member(s)	5
With Non-employee Tied to company	3
With Someone External to company	26
Total	283
Outside Job Setting	
Alone	91
With Others From Work	34
With Family Member(s)	25
With Non-Employee Tied to Company	4
With Someone External to Company	47
Total	201
No Context	29
Other (All Outside)	75
Total	104

Thus, most (88%) of the photographs contained individuals somehow tied to the company. However, individuals tied to the company were almost as likely to be shown at work as they were away from work. Regardless of where an individual was shown, s/he was more likely than not to be shown alone.

For the purposes of the final categorical listing, only direct company employees were considered. Thus, the population analysed here comprises 824 individuals. The occupational role categories parallel those used by

the U.S. Labor Department.[16] As shown in Table 5, the occupational category represented more than any other was the white collar professional. White collar professionals include such individuals as managers, administrators, and technical personnel. Next in terms of overall representation were blue collar workers. Considered together, white and blue collar workers made up just over 81% of the population. This representation is somewhat out of line with U.S. Department of Labor statistics which indicate that during the time period studied white and blue collar workers made up about 64% of the American work force. In comparison with white and blue collar representation, very few clerical, sales, and service personnel are shown. Only 49 individuals in clerical positions were depicted, and only 45 individuals is sales were shown. Taken together these two categories represent about 11% of the sample population considered here. This figure is relatively close to the U.S. Department of Labor statistics which indicate that the general work force contains about 12% sales and clerical personnel. The occupational category most strongly underrepresented in the population was service. Only 8 individuals or less than 1% were shown in service occupations. This figure compares with 9.2% of the actual American work force. However, this finding may easily be explained by the fact that the organizations represented in the magazines were corporations rather than service organizations.

As is also shown in Table 5, the number of individuals shown in each occupational category remained fairly stable across the years studied. The only real exception to this generalization is the year 1978 when significantly more white collar workers were shown than any other year. In fact, almost twice as many white collar workers were pictured in 1978 than were pictured in any other single year. A shift in emphasis did seem to occur in 1983. Table 5 reflects that in 1983 the number of blue collar workers shown actually outnumbered the number of white collar workers. However, because 1983 was the final year studied, it is impossible to discern whether this

does in fact reflect a shift in emphasis or is only an anomaly. However, the number of blue collar workers shown did seem to fluctuate more than any other occupational category. For example, the number was up in 1978, down in 1979, up again in 1980, down somewhat in 1981, and back up again in 1982. The number then stabilized with almost as many blue collar workers shown in 1982 as in 1983. If one compares the number of blue collar workers depicted in a given year with the number of white collar workers, an interesting phenomenon is seen. In 1978, 1979, and 1981, the ratio of white collar to blue collar workers was about 2 to 1. However, in 1980 and 1982, and 1983 the ratio was much closer to 1 to 1.

TABLE 5

Occupational Roles By Year

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	Total
White Collar	114	51	59	62	62	46	394
Blue Collar	62	24	48	30	55	58	277
Clerical	11	8	5	15	6	4	49
Sales	7	11	7	8	12	0	45
Can't Determine	3	22	12	12	1	1	72

It is also interesting to note that the specific occupational roles of 72 individuals could not precisely be determined. However, because the individual was identified as being attached to a specific division or department, that individual could be included as part of the direct employee universe.

While magazine cover photographs have been included throughout the study, the dominant position of such photographs dictates a brief separate discussion.

An analysis of the cover photographs shows that cover photo content did seem to differ from the overall study findings. Of the 39 magazines, 18 or just over 46% were no person covers. Of the study overall, only 14.7% of the photographs coded were no person photographs. Further, occupational role representation on the cover differs significantly from the study findings. While overall more white collar professionals were pictured than any other occupational category, only one magazine cover featured a white collar worker. On the other hand, blue collar workers at work (usually wearing hard hats) were featured on the covers of 13 magazines. While overall very few service or clerical workers were pictured within the magazines, three covers were devoted to these occupations. More specifically, two covers featured service personnel (both security) at work. One cover featured a clerical worker outside the work environment. The remaining cover showed a volunteer group working in support of a social responsibility project. Thus, when employees were shown on the magazines cover, they overwhelmingly were shown in the direct work environment. This finding did not hold for the sample overall.

Summary and Discussion

In general, the study found that the decisions house journal editors make concerning who will be pictured and what the individuals pictured will be shown doing, seemed to remain remarkably consistent across the years sampled. Except in the case of cover photographs, the publications studied overwhelmingly favored the photograph featuring people over the non-person photograph. Further, the publications generally tended to picture roughly the same number of individuals each year. The publications were found to picture predominately direct company employees. While the proportion of employees shown to non-employees shown was markedly different in one year, for the remainder of the years studied, about 7 out of every 10 individuals shown were direct company employees. Actually, this figure seems somewhat low. Publication editors are selecting photographs which

either include or feature individuals external to the organization almost 30% of the time. However, the study found that many of these individuals were recipients of social responsibility projects by the organization. Therefore, they could be considered an attempt to keep employees informed about what the company is doing as well as an attempt to generate good feelings about the company as a place to work. The sample photographs favored showing the employee(s) within the direct work environment. That is, 48% of the photographs coded depicted the employee at work. Thirty-four percent of the photographs showed employees away from the direct work environment. These findings are interesting in light of the findings of IABC's 1980 study which found that employees were most interested in job related information and least interested in stories about other employees and personal news. Most of the photographs which showed employees off the job accompanied feature stories about unusual hobbies or how off the job time was used. Thus, the study findings would tend to indicate that when compared with employee informational interests, too many photographs are used to support categories of information not high on the interest scale. The study also found that when individuals were shown on or off the job, they tended to be shown alone. This finding may in part support the reality that many types of work are in fact solitary pursuits. However, the finding may also reflect an editorial preference for a single person photographic composition. The study findings indicate that the publication editors had a distinct preference for depicting white and blue collar workers. Over 81% of the direct company employees shown were either white or blue collar workers. These figures may well represent the actual occupational mix of the organizations studied, but they do not reflect the actual make-up of the American work force for the time period studied. The figures also indicate that editors seem to be a little less sure of how to present blue collar workers than they are any other occupational category. The number of blue collar workers pictured fluctuated rather dramatically during the years studied.

The same generalizations drawn for the study findings overall did not hold for magazine cover photographs. Editors were much less likely to select a non-person cover photograph than they were an internal non-person photograph. Further, editors displayed a distinct preference for cover photographs featuring blue collar workers wearing hard hats at work.

While the data base for this study is too limited to support sweeping generalizations, the study did find editorial consistency in photo content in its sampled publications. This consistency may be due to on-going conscious editorial decisions or it may come from custom (that is the individual photographer/editor finds it easier to compose what s/he believes to be a "good" one person photograph than a "good" multi-person photograph). Regardless of the reason, the study does point to the need for additional exploration in the area. More corporate publications need to be analysed to expand the data base from which conclusions may be drawn. The IABC interest inventory might be specifically applied to the photographs to see if the photographs are being used to fulfill high or low employee informational interest areas. After a content analysis of photographs was conducted on a publication sample, editors could be interviewed to discuss their choices. A survey of house journal editors to learn if they consider selecting and editing the content of their photographs in similar ways to the manner in which they select their stories could yield interesting results.

Endnotes

[1]"Profile 1975," Syracuse University and The International Association of Business Communicators (San Francisco: IABC, 1975).

[2]Internal Publications Directory, Vol. 5 of the 1982-1983 Media Encyclopedia Working Press of the Nation (Chicago: National Research Bureau, 1982).

[3]Joyce A. Gildea, "45,000 Employees Judge Effectiveness of Internal Communication," Journal of Organizational communication (1981/2), pp. 3-11.

[4]Ibid., p. 8.

[5]For example, see, "Readers Respond to Alcoa News Survey," Alcoa News (February 1983), pp. 14-15.

[6]Stuart H. Surlin and Barry Walker, "Employee Evaluations of Handling of News By a Corporate Newspaper," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 52, No. 1, (Spring 1975).

[7]J.W. Click, "Employee Magazines in the Public Relations Program," Public Relations Quarterly, Vol. 12 (Summer 1967).

[8]For example, see J.W. Click and Russell N. Baird, Magazine Editing and Production, 3rd edition, (Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown, 1983), and Ralph Darrow, House Journal Editing, (Danville, Illinios: Interstate Printers & Publishers, Inc., 1974).

[9]For example, see Surlin and Walker, Click, Click and Baird, and Darrow.

[10]Two recent unpublished studies should be mentioned here. One was presented by Lynn Masel-Walters and Carolyn Cline to the Educator's Academy during IABC's 1983 national convention. The other is by Nickieann Fleener and was presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Status of Women Committee during the 1983 AEJMC national convention. Both these studies used differing samples of employee publications to investigate the manners in which men and women were depicted.

[11]John Collier, "Evaluating Visual Data," in Jon Wagner, ed., Images of Information: Still Photography in the social sciences (Beverly Hills, SAGE, 1979), ppl 161-169.

[12]Daniel Boorstin, The Image: A Guide to Pseudo Events in America (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 9.

[13]Wagner, ed., Images of Information.

[14]Collier, p. 165.

[15]The publications and issues read were: Alcoa News, Jan/Feb 1978, 1979:3; 1979:4; Dec 1980; May 1981; Oct 1981; Jan 1982; March 1982; Feb 1983; Dec. 1983: CommUnicator, April 1978, Nov. 1978, April 1979, Nov. 1979, April 1980, Sept 1980, March 1981, Sept. 1981, Feb. 1982, Nov. 1982, Jan. 1983, Sept. 1983: Ralston-Purina, July/Aug 1978, Oct. 1979; 1980:1; 1980:5, 1981:4, 1982:3, 1983:2; Standard Oiler, March/April 1978; June/July 1978, Aug 1979, May 1980; May 1981 Sept/Oct 1981; May 1982, Sept/Oct 1982; March/April 1983, May 1983.

[16]For example, see U.S. Labor Department, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employed Persons By Major Occupational Groups and Sex," The World Almanac And Book of Facts 1982 (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, Inc., 1981), p. 114.